

310 PSYCHOLOGICAL DATA :
DEVELOPMENT

Another mechanism, one which plays a great part in the behaviour of children between the first or second years of infancy and later life, is that of *testing* inner phantasy by real activity aimed at attaining some proof that one's phantasies are not true. It is this mechanism which makes many a child of three and four years of age stubborn and defiant. He has to be naughty in order to see whether his parents will really injure or destroy him. It will be understood that a child only has recourse to this mechanism in any marked degree when his punishment phantasies are very acute, and he does really fear that his parents will burn or drown or eat him up for his aggressive wishes. But in a milder way it is a normal mode of psychic development with all children, and it is especially characteristic of the latency period of sexual development, that is, the period which ensues after the first deep emotional conflict with regard to the parents has undergone a greater or lesser degree of repression—from about four or five years onwards to puberty.

One aspect of this testing of reality by acting out the aggressive wishes, the results of which are so feared, is the child's wish to be in *control* of the situation. He feels he must learn how far instinct can be expressed, how much one can be angry, greedy or lustful without utter disaster; and, moreover, how much actual punishment one can endure without being destroyed. And he feels he must control both wish and retribution.

A striking example of this- reality-testing occurred recently with a little girl patient of nine years of age, who had been under treatment with me for very severe anxiety attacks and phobias. The analysis had reached a

phase in which
 her very deep fears of the bad introjected
 parents who would
 poison and attack her¹ were in the
 foreground. These
 anxieties had taken a special form connected
 with (a) the
 child's intellectual ambition in school work, that
 is, her wish
 that the contents of her head should be good, (b)
 the voice of
 the analyst, which often seemed to the child to
 be attacking
 her through her ear, and (c) her own bad
 thoughts and bad
 knowledge (obscene terms) which she had got
 into her head
 through her ear. These various anxieties were
 concentrated
 on the inside of the head, and resulted in a slight
 but persistent

¹ See p. 285, n.